

from excessive rent charges; Specter, Leahy, Cornyn, Feinstein, Biden.

III. Matters: S.J. Res. 1, Marriage Protection Amendment; Allard, Sessions, Kyl, Hatch, Cornyn, Coburn, Brownback.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 16, 2006, for a committee hearing titled "Looking At Our Homeless Veterans' Programs: How Effective Are They?" The hearing will take place in room 418 of the Russell Senate Office Building at 10 a.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, GOVERNMENT INFORMATION, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, and International Security be authorized to meet on Thursday, March 16, 2006, at 9:30 a.m. for a hearing regarding "Earmark Reform: Understanding the Obligation of Funds Transparency Act".

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTION, CIVIL RIGHTS AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Property Rights be authorized to meet to conduct a markup on Thursday, March 16, 2006 at 1:30 p.m. in Dirksen Senate Office Building Room 226 on S.J. Res. 12, the Flag Desecration Resolution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on March 16, 2006 at time 3:30 p.m., in open session to receive testimony on global strike plans and programs in review of the defense authorization request for fiscal year 2007.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. GREGG. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that Mark Van de Water of the Senate Appropriations Committee be granted the privilege of the floor during the consideration of S. Con. Res. 83.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SENATE BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, we have several items in wrapup in a little bit and a lot of activity is going on. Hopefully in 15 or 20 minutes we will be able to close the Senate. I come to the Senate to make a couple of statements.

I begin with the very brief comment on the budget itself. I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their tremendous efforts in bringing to a close passage of a budget resolution that this Senate can be very proud of. Overall management of the budget was superb. I thank Chairman JUDD GREGG and Senator KENT CONRAD for their leadership, for their patience on what is always a very difficult process that culminates in this vote-aroma that we have been in from about 1:30 today up until about an hour ago. With these vote-aramas, everyone is on the floor and milling around, considering amendment after amendment. It is a challenge for all Senators, with tensions tending to rise. To have two cool heads calmly manage this bill is a real tribute to both of them. I thank them for their leadership.

The budget itself is a tough budget. It is a disciplined budget. It restrains spending and tackles the deficit. It reflects our commitment to America's future and to making America stronger and safer and more economically sound. Like so many of the issues we tackled this year, it is not an easy process. It has not been a very easy process. With determination and with focus, a lot of energy by leading on principle, we are delivering meaningful solutions for the American people. We have demonstrated this Senate can and does govern. We have been doing that consistently.

As we reflect over the last several weeks, no more so than with the confirmation of Justice Samuel Alito. A lot of our opponents had tried to distort his record and to undermine the process, but this Senate held firm, and with that Judge Alito did receive a fair up-or-down vote that he deserved in the Senate. But to get to that point was tough. We proved that the Senate can hold a free, a dignified, and a thorough debate while at the same time fulfilling our constitutional responsibility of giving advice and consent. Justice Alito now sits on the Supreme Court of the United States. In every respect Judge Alito was a nominee who meets the highest standards of excellence. I congratulate him once again on his most deserved achievement.

Principle and determination to protect the American people also guided more recently our passage of the PATRIOT Act. Again, the process got stymied. There was a lot of delay. There was a lot of postponement. But we pressed forward and after sustained negotiations we were able to secure law enforcement's No. 1 terrorist fighting tool, the USA PATRIOT Act.

The legislation itself works to promote information sharing and breaking down barriers between our intelligence

agencies and our law enforcement agencies. It has proven to be an effective tool. It levels the playing field so we can effectively harness all of our resources to defeat terror. It appropriately balances the constitutional rights of all Americans against our need to effectively investigate and halt potential terrorist attacks. Every day it is helping the authorities dismantle terrorist organizations and stop our enemies in their tracks.

Keeping America strong also means keeping our economy thriving, and that is why also this past month we passed the Tax Relief Act of 2005. We know that tax cuts work. We know they grow the economy and help create jobs. In 2001 we delivered tax relief to the American people of \$1.4 trillion; 2 years later, another \$350 billion. We cut taxes on income and marriage. We doubled the child tax credit, we slashed taxes on capital gains and dividends. And the product we are seeing, our economy, has grown. We created over 5 million jobs in the last 36 months. Unemployment is the lowest it has been since before September 11, lower now than the average of the 1990s, those boom years, and the 1980s and the 1970s. Home ownership is up. Almost 70 percent of Americans own their homes. Minority ownership is at an all-time high. Tax relief has led to 3 years of continued strong growth.

The tax cuts are working. Even this past year we saw growth in revenues coming to the Government in over 10 percent, in double digits. When we return, I hope we will be able to address the conference report on this tax reconciliation bill.

That brings me to what will come in the 2 weeks after the current recess.

Our attention is to focus on border security when we come back. Our country needs security at our borders in order to stop the flow of illegal immigration and make America safer from foreign criminals and terrorists.

Today, I introduced a border security bill to ensure the Senate will have legislation available for consideration during that week of March 27. The Senate Judiciary Committee, under the fantastic leadership of ARLEN SPECTER, has been addressing border security and interior enforcement aggressively over the last 3 weeks. They have had what we all know of as a markup this week, including today and yesterday, on 2 days of last week and the week before. ARLEN SPECTER has been a tireless leader. Indeed, they will return on that first Monday to continue that markup.

Now is the time to take their outstanding work to the floor. That is exactly what we will do. The bill I introduced is based on the consensus enforcement, visa reform, and immigration litigation reform titles of Chairman SPECTER's bill, the markup of border security legislation. It focuses on ensuring strict enforcement of our Nation's immigration laws.

I do look forward to bringing a border security bill to the floor in the